

**Speech by Minister Josephine Teo  
at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
Career Women's Group's International Women's Day 2024 Conference  
(3 March 2024)**

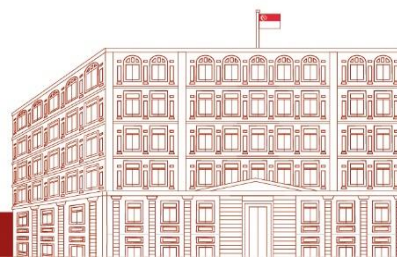
**"Building Legacies, Igniting Futures"**

Mr Kho Choon Keng, President, Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry 新加坡中华总商会会长高泉庆先生

Dr Hwang Yee Cheau, Chairperson, SCCCI – Career Women's Group 新加坡中华总商会事业女性组主席黄亦巧医生

Colleagues and friends 各位来宾、朋友们

1. 大家傍晚好！我很高兴受邀出席今晚的活动和大家一起庆祝国际妇女节，同时欢庆新加坡中华总商会事业女性组成立 30 周年。
2. 由于今晚的活动也吸引到英文媒体来报道，所以请容许我，先以英语，然后以华语来进行演讲。
3. As this is Budget season, you can well imagine where my attentions are focussed. I also seek your kind understanding of having to leave a bit earlier, before the party ends.
4. But while I am here, let me just say that this year's Budget, as with many Budgets over the years, have elements that recognise the challenges women in Singapore face, help women to advance, and fulfil their potential.
5. In fact, I plan to outline some of the Budget announcements that were designed very much with women's needs in mind. It's not a women-only Budget, but certainly a women-friendly Budget.
6. Before that, however, let me outline our recent moves in support of women.
7. Women have continued to do well and do better in Singapore since I last spoke at this event in 2018.
8. One significant milestone was the passage in Parliament of our first-ever Motion on Women's Development. I moved the motion in April 2022, so we could debate the White Paper that the Government had published to mark the 60th anniversary of the Women's Charter. As many of you already know, the Women's Charter was one of the first things the PAP put in place, when it first formed the Government decades ago. An astounding 40 MPs joined in the debate; about half were men. Both men and women spoke about the impact of women role models in their lives. It was a really unusual debate where names of women who are prominent, as well as who played extraordinary roles in various Members' lives were talked about. It was one of the most moving debates that I was part of.



9. During the debate, I encouraged MPs to suggest: How we can further catalyse collective actions to help women do even better; and how we can realise greater equality of partnership between women and men, recognising that the men in our lives can be our allies.

10. The debate concluded with many worthy suggestions. It also recognised that advancing the cause of women is a journey without end. Most important, it affirmed the key values we hold dear in Singapore society, which are:

- a. The equality of women and men as a foundation;
- b. The importance of partnership in our approaches; and
- c. Mutual respect between women and men always.

11. 既然我们是人民行动党政府，就不能单说不做，必须有所“行动”，竭尽所能落实一切计划。Since we are the People's Action Party, the PAP government doesn't just “talk”, we try our best to “do”. As a follow up to the motion, we have made three further moves.

12. First, the Government will introduce the Workplace Fairness Legislation to strengthen Singapore's harmonious workplace culture while providing protection and redress to workers who experience discrimination. As I speak about this, I happen to see in the room one of the earliest champions of women in the labour movement, and it's none other than Mrs Yu-Foo Yee Shoon. I hope that she's just as happy as I am that drafting of the legislation is aimed to be ready in the second half of 2024. The Workplace Fairness Legislation will strengthen protections against discrimination and provide assurance to workers that they can come forward to report without fear of retaliation. It will also ensure that employees and jobseekers have fair access to job opportunities.

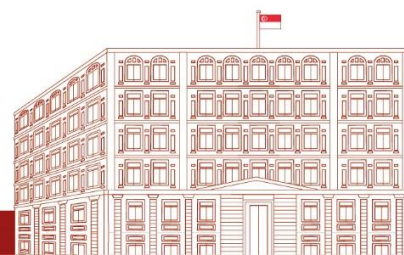
13. Second, we are supporting greater representation of women in leadership roles. The revised Singapore Exchange Listing Rules will improve board diversity, including gender diversity in listed companies. And, I should say, probably in all of our trade associations and chambers, the gender diversity could be improved too, right?

14. Third, recognising that women still tend to carry more of our caregiving load, we will give more support to caregivers.

- a. New Tripartite Guidelines on Flexible Work Arrangement Requests is expected to be released this year, and will set norms and expectations on how requests for Flexible Work Arrangements should be properly considered by employers, and also used responsibly by employees.
- b. We are also piloting an expansion of the Household Services Scheme to include basic child-minding and elder-minding services, to provide more options for families to meet their household needs.

15. These efforts add to a whole set of measures already in place. Together, they have enabled many more women to stay or return to the workforce and to excel.

- a. As a result, our employment rate for women aged 25-64 has continued to rise, and at 77% is one of the highest in the world. The adjusted gender pay gap has also further narrowed.



- b. In our tech workforce, about 40% are women compared to 22% across European companies, and the representation of women among CEOs in Singapore is more than double the global average.

16. In the recent Budget announced by DPM Lawrence Wong, the Government has shown that it is willing to do more.

17. For women in charge of household finances, there is additional support to cope with Cost of Living. We see these through:

- a. Extra CDC vouchers
- b. Enhanced U-Save, as well as S&CC Rebates

18. As former Minister of Manpower and Minister looking after Population, I was particularly cheered that some of the changes I initiated are being expanded. For example, Silver Support payouts will go up by 20% and be provided to more people. In case you're not aware, about two thirds of Silver Support recipients are women. The Government will also provide a Retirement Savings Bonus to top up the CPF accounts of those with less, majority of whom are women. Most of all, I'm happy that childcare fees will be further reduced and non-working mothers from lower-income households will get higher subsidies for their children in preschools.

19. For many years, even when I was on the back bench, I had advocated for better support to women professionals who had to leave the workforce for a variety of reasons. It is tougher for them to rejoin the workforce at the right level because the skills demanded of professionals are higher and change quickly. Not only had they stagnated relative to their peers, they had to compete with younger workers with new skills.

20. As I am a firm believer that such women should have a chance to advance again, two announcements stood out for me:

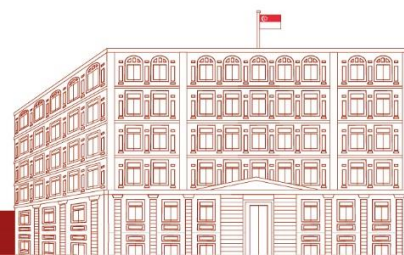
- a. The \$4k top-up to our Skillsfuture Credit
- b. The Level-Up Programme for full-time diploma studies that comes with up to \$3k in monthly training allowance for two years.

21. I believe that these programmes can help more women keep their skills up to date. If they take full advantage of the available support, they have the opportunity to experience another career upswing, one they fully deserve to have.

22. Now, please allow me to share in Mandarin how organisations like the SCCCI are essential in empowering women too.

23. 当政府尽全力改善女性权益时，我们必须，也很乐意，与理念相同的组织，如中华总商会，建立密切的合作。

24. 你们是商界的代表，我们需要你们的帮助，以打造一个更公平的职场，并确保新加坡女性能够在职场上得到更多支持、保护和尊重，能充分发挥她们的正能量。



25. 像事业女性组，这样的组织也非常适合主办一些促进交流、提供指导的活动。小组能为会员们提供一个宝贵的平台，让大家互相分享珍贵的经验和心得。这当然也包括营造安全的环境，讨论工作上碰到的挑战。

26. 事业女性组 1994 年成立时，主要是为了鼓励女性参与总商会的活动。从一个兴趣小组，你们这 30 年来一路扩展到今时今日，成为了一个拥有接近 900 名成员的组织。规模相当庞大，也是一个充满活力的社群。

27. 在此，我要表扬事业女性组，不遗余力地为专业领域的女性发声，在倡导一个平等又具包容性的职场方面做出巨大的努力。我也鼓励大家帮助你们的会员善待自己，并继续互相支持，活出属于自己的精彩。

28. 此外，虽然我已经不主管我国的人口事务，不再是一些人口中的“宝宝部长”，但我也想为现任这项职务的英兰妮部长做出呼吁：在事业女性组主办的活动当中，希望你们能够多多鼓励年轻女性，在打拼事业的同时，也要考虑结婚生子，在事业和家庭中取得平衡。今晚的对话绝对不能少了这个结婚生子的课题。不过，我要先强调，这不仅是一个关乎女性的课题。这个国家大事，也需要男性的参与，需要大家的全力支持。

29. 幸运的是，我们的社会不再持有“女子无才便是德”的保守观念，也不再期望女性待在家中照料孩子。相反的，新加坡的女性是有选择的。任何人都没有权为她们做主。

30. 我对新加坡在这方面的前景保持乐观，因为越来越多男性开始承担照料家庭的职务。爸爸的投入，让妈妈们更能兼顾事业，也让家庭生活更加好应付。

31. 我们应竭尽所能，打造一个亲家庭的社会，在国人养儿育女的道路上支持他们。我刚才就举例说明了政府推出的有关措施。

32. 我们也能为身边的亲友营造有利的环境 -- 如帮助他们扩大社交圈子，帮助他们兼顾工作和家庭。这些都是一些实际的行动来支持年轻一代实现结婚生子的人生目标。如果我们能做到这一点，或许不只是企业会 Huat ah!，我们的人口生育率也会 Huat ah!

33. 最后，我想再次感谢你们的邀请。我也要祝贺事业女性组迈入这个重大的里程碑，在“三十而立”之年硕果累累。我非常期待再次和大家相聚一堂，共同庆祝我国女性的成就!

34. 谢谢大家! Thank you and have a great evening!

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